



Submitted Photo

**John MacMartin**, president of the Minot Area Chamber of Commerce, had a chance to fire a 50-caliber machine gun on top of a Humvee with the 1st Armored Division in Grafenwoehr, Germany. MacMartin and other members of the Defense Department's Joint Civilian Orientation Conference visited there and other U.S. European Command sites this month.

## Chamber president visits overseas bases

An invitation from Secretary of Defense Donald Rumsfeld took Minot Area Chamber of Commerce President John MacMartin nearly halfway around the world this month visiting military troops in U.S. European Command.

MacMartin was among a group of about 50 civilian leaders from across the country participating in the Defense Department's Joint Civilian Orientation Conference, also known as JCOC, Oct. 16-22.

The program has been in existence since the late 1940s and MacMartin was part of the 70th group selected to travel. Participation in the program is by nomination — MacMartin was nominated by a former commander at Minot Air Force Base.

In the past, he said the program has been done primarily on the mainland but because so many military members are deployed, efforts are made to have participants go to other areas.

"The purpose really is to get us out and let us begin to interact with the young men and women in our armed services," said MacMartin, who has been president of the

Minot Area Chamber of Commerce since 1990. MacMartin and the Chamber maintain strong ties with the military at Minot.

The conference group, representing a cross-section of people with varying careers — college presidents, entrepreneurs, investment bankers, a judge, legislators and others started the conference at the Pentagon. There they met with Gordon England, acting deputy secretary of defense. Secretary of Defense Rumsfeld was leaving later that day for a visit to China.

From there, they went to Quantico, Va., to see Marines, then boarded a C-17 for the start of their whirlwind tour of military forces in Europe, flying first to Stuttgart, Germany, to visit special forces. "We had a chance to interact with them — have lunch and also fire some weapons," MacMartin said.

At Stuttgart, U.S. European Command headquarters, Air Force Gen. Chuck Wald, a Minot native who is deputy commander of European Command, met with the group.



Story by  
**ELOISE  
OGDEN,**  
Regional  
Editor



The command's area of responsibility covers more than 21 million square miles and includes 91 countries and territories.

The next day, the group boarded a C-130 and flew to Grafenwoehr, Germany. "That's where we saw the 1st Armored Division with Bradleys, Abrams, the Apache helicopter and their howitzers," MacMartin said.

Later that day, they visited Landstuhl Regional Medical Center near Ramstein Air Base in Germany. It is the largest American hospital outside the U.S.

"Everybody refers to it as Ramstein hospital, but the hospital isn't on the base. It's actually Landstuhl Regional Medical Center," MacMartin said. "Because we were a large group we couldn't all go upstairs into the wards so everybody brought some phone cards or other things to leave. One of the guys, when he got the e-mail about phone cards, challenged his employees. He brought a box of 2,000 phone cards for them to hand out."

Conference participants also stopped at the Fisher House, which is a home away from home for military families of patients receiving medical care, and then visited Air Force members at Ramstein Air Base.

They went on to Royal Air Force Molesworth in England, site of the European Command's Central Joint Analysis Center, which analyzes intelligence information for the United States and NATO, then to RAF Mildenhall, also in England.

From there, MacMartin and other conference members flew to Naples, Italy, where they boarded the U.S.S. Whitney to observe its mission. The Whitney is the flagship of the U.S. Navy's Sixth Fleet.

"We had other activities planned in Naples for Saturday morning but the Naples police were doing a major terrorist exercise. They were going to shut the roads to the community down so we needed to be out so we could get to the airport," MacMartin said. Consequently, the group's schedule was revised.

"One thing I really took away is how bright, how committed to the job the young men and women of our armed forces are. It didn't matter if they were Marines, Army, Navy, Air Force," MacMartin said. He said they did not visit any Coast Guard members there are none deployed in European Command.

When the conference group was on its way back to the United States, MacMartin said their plane made a stop in Ireland to refuel. In the terminal as they waited and were walking down the hall, he said all of a sudden a large group of people in brown uniforms started coming toward them.

"It was a group of 50 to 100 Army soldiers," MacMartin said. "They had stopped probably for the same reason, and they were on their way to Iraq. As we walked down the

hall, we shook hands, thanked them for what they did and wished them a safe travel (there were) wet eyes in both groups," MacMartin said.

The Joint Civilian Orientation Conference's goal is to give civilians an up-close look at the inner workings of the military. Participants "learn and provide input, and take the message back," MacMartin said.

He will be giving a presentation about the conference to the Minot Chamber board. Later, he also plans to offer his presentation to service clubs in the area.

*(Prairie Profile is a weekly feature profiling interesting people in our region. We welcome suggestions from our readers. Call Regional Editor Eloise Ogden at 857-1944 or Managing Editor Kent Olson at 857-1939. Either can be reached at 1-800-735-3229. You also can send e-mail suggestions to [mdnews@ndweb.com](mailto:mdnews@ndweb.com)).*